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SUBJECT: PAM STEAMS AHEAD WHILE PJD SHUT OUT OF UPPER HOUSE

REF: RABAT 0607

Classified By: Ambassador Samuel L. Kaplan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The year-old Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) continues to engineer significant -- and, to some, unsettling -- electoral victories following its impressive showing in June's communal elections. In the latest of many indirect elections that by law follow the communal contests, the PAM triumphed in the upper house of parliament, picking up 22 seats and securing the chamber's presidency. These victories represent less the PAM's appeal to voters, and more its ability to horse trade, build coalitions, and otherwise legally manipulate Morocco's byzantine indirect electoral process. In addition, the PAM also flawlessly executed another step in its long-term strategy of marginalizing the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD), which gained no new seats and saw its overall upper house contingent remain at two. The PJD, which acknowledges the disadvantages it faces in indirect contests, appears to have taken its losses in stride and still claims that it will win control of the lower house of Parliament in 2012, -- i.e., during Morocco's next direct election. END SUMMARY.

PAM CONTINUES TO ROLL

12. (U) On October 2, Morocco held indirect elections for 90 of 270 seats in the Chamber of Councilors (CoC), the upper house of Parliament. As expected, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) proved, for all intents and purposes, the victor. The PAM picked up 22 of the contested 90 seats, giving it 20 percent of the chamber's seats. (NOTE: The upper house's 270 members serve 9-year terms with 1/3 (90) of the Chamber's members elected every 3 years. Prior to the October 2 election, 32 of the 180 councilors who were not up for election this year had converted to the PAM after it was created last year. END NOTE.) The Istiqlal (Independence) Party finished second, winning 17 seats, with the Popular Movement (MP) winning 11, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) taking 10, the Rally of National Independents (RNI) 9, and labor unions 9. (Other parties won the remaining seats.)

13. (C) In another triumph for the PAM, following upper house elections, the new CoC held internal elections for Chairman of the Chamber in which PAM candidate Mohammed Shiekh Biadilah (See bio note) defeated incumbent RNI candidate El Maati Bendakour. This PAM victory surprised Moroccan political pundits because the RNI still clings to a numerical majority coalition in the upper house. However, it attests to PAM operatives' skillful -- and fully legal -- manipulation of the Byzantine rules that govern Morocco's extensive cycle of indirect elections, which preceded the CoC elections by two weeks -- in order to secure votes in the CoC

for Biadilah. (COMMENT: These coalitions are indeed temporary. PAM's newly-elected Deputy Chairman of the Rabat Regional Council told PolCouns his party gave the Chairmanship -- he said he would have won -- to Istiqlal as part of a deal to help secure votes for Biadilah in the CoC. However, he gleefully added, "The chairman is incompetent, and his mistakes will only make the PAM look good." END COMMENT.)

PJD SHUT OUT

¶4. (SBU) If PAM was the big winner, the Islamist PJD was the big loser -- exactly as PAM had sought. It won no new seats during the Oct. 2 contests, and saw its overall contingent in the CoC remain at 2 seats, which it won only through its association with certain labor unions, rather than through its party apparatus. Since its re-incarnation from a "pro-democracy NGO" to a political party a year ago, the PAM has camouflaged many of its agendas, but one has always been openly stated: to shut the PJD out of government on all levels. In June, PAM used backroom negotiations with other parties and pressure tactics to weaken the PJD's showing (reftel) in the communal elections, which are crucial because the winners in those elections not only go on to become city counselors but also the "super-electors" in the numerous indirect elections that follow. The PAM has since continued its strategy of marginalizing the PJD through the same horse trading and deal-making that brought it success in the CoC contests.

¶5. (SBU) To a certain extent, the PJD has played right into the PAM's hands by openly refusing to engage in backroom party politics, which it believes would taint its image as the only Moroccan party truly committed to transparency and to eliminating corruption. For example, in downplaying his party's losses, Kenitra mayor and PJD parliamentarian Abdelaziz Rabbah stated that the PJD will never accept involvement in "untransparent" negotiations at which the PAM has proven so adept. Numerous PJD representatives have refrained from reacting negatively to the defeats they have suffered since June, arguing that their true strength lies in direct elections and that they will prove this with an impressive showing in the 2012 elections for the lower house of Parliament, i.e., Morocco's next direct contests.

A PATTERN HAS EMERGED

¶6. (U) In the September contests for seats in the 16 Regional Councils, the PAM won 212 of the 1,220 seats (17.3 percent), followed by Istiqlal (154 seats) (12.6 percent), the RNI (123 seats) (10 percent), the USFP (89 seats) (7.3 percent), the Constitutional Union (65 seats) (5.3 percent), the MP (62 seats) (5.1 percent), and the PJD (28 seats) (2.3 percent). Other parties won less than 20 seats or less than 1.6 percent each. The provincial elections in August had seen a similar pattern, with Istiqlal coming just ahead of the PAM with 14.35 percent of the seats. The PAM won 13.89 percent, the RNI 10.7 percent, the USFP 8.8, the MP 6.6, and the UC 5 percent. Interestingly, 25.2 percent of the victors in these latter contests were independents.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) These results track very closely with the results of the municipal elections. The PJD's relatively sanguine response both to the PAM's aggressive emergence and to its poor showing in recent indirect elections is in large part genuine. The Chamber of Councilors does not have the same degree of impact on legislation as the lower house; it does not reflect the true influence or popularity of individual political parties in Moroccan society; and its elections involve the inter-party politicking to which the PJD is

genuinely opposed. The PJD is indeed focused on positioning itself for a good showing in the more significant lower house elections in 2012, and there is no doubt that its appeal in direct elections -- especially in the urban areas -- is something the PAM and its fellow travelers (temporary or long-term) will have a harder time manipulating. Nevertheless, if current trends are any indication, all political parties -- not just the PJD -- face an enormous challenge in the form of fast-rising, very hard hitting PAM. The positive results for the PAM in the CoC testify to an ability to horse trade and manipulate Morocco's enormously complicated electoral rules to its advantage ("to cheat by the rules," as one member of another party put it) that no other party can hope to match. These skills, coupled with the increasingly unambiguous reality that PAM is the Palace favorite (septel), raises the possibility of PAM eventually emerging as a single political giant with no true rival. END COMMENT.

BIO NOTE

18. (U) Biadilah is now the fourth highest-ranking official from the King in Morocco. He is the first Saharawi to have risen to such a high level in Moroccan politics. He began his political career as a deputy in the lower house in 1977, later becoming Minister of Health from 2002-2007. In February 2009, he became the Secretary General of the PAM. END BIO NOTE.

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